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Setting Plato Straight: Translating Ancient Sexuality in the Renaissance

Todd W. Reeser

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When we talk of platonic love or relationships today, we mean something very different from what Plato meant. For this, we have fifteenth and sixteenth-century European humanists to thank. As these scholars—most of them Catholic—read, digested, and translated Plato, they found themselves faced with a fundamental problem: how to be faithful to the text yet not propagate pederasty or homosexuality.

In *Setting Plato Straight*, Todd W. Reeser undertakes the first sustained and comprehensive study of Renaissance textual responses to Platonic same-sex sexuality. Reeser mines an expansive collection of translations, commentaries, and literary sources to study how Renaissance translators transformed ancient eros into non-erotic, non-homosexual relations. He analyzes the interpretive lenses translators employed and the ways in which they read and reread Plato's texts. In spite of this cleansing, Reeser finds surviving traces of Platonic same-sex sexuality that imply a complicated, recurring process of course-correction—of setting Plato straight.

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